

Luke 2:1-12

Away in a Manger

Celebrate, Christ is come!

It happens more often than one might think, but the most recent example of many people not having a place to sleep was this past week at Gatwick airport in England, when all airline flights were grounded as unauthorized drones flew in Gatwick airspace. At this busiest time of year, Christmas travelers were caught in what has been called a deliberate disruption of airport operations. The Chief Operating officer in essence shutting down the airport to insure traveler's safety until the police and military could determine who was operating the drones or at least feel that there was no imminent threat.

There are a number of variables in the outcome yet to be determined, but thankfully flights have resumed and people are finally getting where they were hoping to go. Still, over a hundred thousand passengers were affected by the shut down. People were sleeping on the floor, and in any corner they could find, in order to get some rest and relief. No comfortable bed to be found.

We like to think that we are in control of things, but when authorities decide to shut down an airport you are not in control. When authorities and governments make decisions, it is most often out of our hands. Each week the news is full of stories in which governments make decisions that impact lives for better or for worse. Look at any ongoing refugee crisis and you know lives around the globe are being impacted.

When seen in that light it doesn't take too much imagination to realize that finding oneself with no place to sleep when masses of people are on the move, particularly because a government has decided that a census must be taken, is not too far a stretch after all.

And so it is that we have this story of a couple named Mary and Joseph who have found themselves at the mercy of a government who has decreed that they want to understand their tax base and, unlike our filling out a form and sending it in by mail or email, they are out on the road, headed to Bethlehem, the town of David, to be counted.

What is interesting here is that if it were not for this decree and movement of people, Mary and Joseph would not have had reason to have their baby in the town that was prophesied to be the birth place of the expected Messiah of the Hebrew people. It seems God had a hand in all that was happening from the moment of the child's inception beginning with Mary a virgin mother and Joseph being told in a dream what to

do. And now a whole government is making decisions that will change the course of history and they don't even know what God is up to.

It is really easy to romanticize the birth of Christ. We set things up where Mary is clean and neat, Joseph lovingly watching over Mother and Son, baby away in a manger, no crying he makes with animals providing a sense of coziness.

There *is* a sense of relief. The baby is healthy, mother and child have made it through the birthing process. There is at least some shelter and comfort from the elements. But Mary would have been exhausted from both the traveling and the birth. And birthing is a messy process. Blood, amniotic fluid, gushing out as the child is born. A baby needing to be cleaned up and kept warm. Jesus came as a human child. No different, and yet he was different.

God was making sure that people knew he was different. It started small. As I said, a mother and father, a child laid in the feeding trough of an animal. He was cared for by his earthly parents but his origins were from God. It was his divinity that was announced by the angels to another group that the government could have cared less about. In fact, it was to this group of people, the shepherds in that region, living in the fields, that an angel of the Lord stood before them and the glory of the Lord shone around them.

Two things about this scene, for starters, the shepherds were so unimportant that the government could care a less whether or not they were counted. So they are not in town, they are in the field. Secondly, how does one imagine the glory of the Lord shining around a host of angels and shepherds. Scriptures tells us the shepherds were terrified. What sights and sounds would have elicited that response from the shepherds?

Still the angels assure the shepherds that they do not need to be afraid for they are bringing good news of great joy for all the people. And here comes the announcement, "to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord."

Saviour. Messiah, Lord.

This is the good news then and the good news now. Because of that night, through a child born to parents who could not manage more than a manger for a bed, God did something amazing that began to change human history. As per God's instructions to Joseph, the child was named Jesus. Jesus matured, learned, then taught, healed, experienced life as we do. Knew joy, love, friendship, betrayal, sorrow, hope, grief, fear, courage, and suffering. And then he fulfilled the role announced by the angels to the shepherds, he became the Savior, the Messiah, the Lord. When his work on earth was done, he died to save us from ourselves and from separation from God.

This story, this message of Good News has been proclaimed for over 2000 years, not just because it is a good story, but because it has changed lives. When believed, and then lived by learning about Jesus, and God's saving work through Jesus the Messiah, it can change relationships, bring hope and joy that defies understanding amidst suffering and grief. It restores people to themselves and to God.

At Christmas we celebrate the babe in the manger who is also Christ the Lord! This is what glory looks like, it is humble, it is bruised, it is rejected, it defeats death, but it is also love so great that God went beyond what we could have imagined to show his love to the world. This is God's gift to you, a child in a manger, with much love. Amen.